

AFEHRI File 19-5-1-13

Research Materials/Source Documents
AWARDS & DECORATIONS

FILE TITLE: Air Force Cross Recipient: Sgt Thomas A. Newman

Reviewed by:

AFEHRI Representative G.R. Akin date 12 Dec 97

EPC Representative J. C. Akin date 16 Dec 97

Scanner Operator Sunny Anderson date 16 Dec 97

APPROVED BY: Gary R. Akin
GARY R. AKIN, CMSgt, USAF
Director
Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute

Sergeant Thomas A. Newman: AF Cross Recipient

Memorial Day -May 30, 1968- to Sgt Newman served as a reminder that sometimes the difference between a memory and a memorial can be a fraction of an inch, a single strand, or a split second. When he joined the Air Force in 1965, he wasted no time in getting to where the action is. While he was still in basic, he volunteered for pararescue duty. About a year later, after seven tough, grueling schools that transformed the former high school student into a rescue expert, he was shipped to Guam. While there, he managed to help save a civilian seaman suffering from acute insulin shock; assisted a Navy corpsman in saving a chief petty officer who suffered a heart attack aboard a submarine; was credited with saving the lives of two Japanese fishermen who suffered severe burns in an engine room fire on board a fishing vessel, and aided in the treatment and evacuation of four more. In each of these cases, the indomitable sergeant had to parachute into the open sea.

Sergeant Newman was accepted for duty in Southeast Asia and departed for Eglin AFB, FL, in December 1967. There he took pararescue specialist training in the HH-3E helicopter. After PACAF Jungle Survival School at Clark AB in the Philippines, he arrived at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand, in March 1968.

Newman and his "Jolly Green" crew had been scrambled to recover Colonel Thomas A. Phillips, after his F-105 had been down by 37mm antiaircraft fire west of Khe Sanh. He volunteered to ride the hoist down through two layers of jungle treetops and help strap the pilot on. Phillips was down in an area dotted with antiaircraft weapons and numerous enemy units. Poor visibility brought on by approaching darkness made it impossible for Newman to evaluate the area. He was unable to predetermine his escape routes should he and the pilot be forced to get to an alternate pickup area on foot. There was only way to find the pilot in the darkness - hunt for him! Newman began to work his way in a constantly expanding circle. He had just completed the first circuit when he noticed that his hovering Jolly Green was catching a lot of automatic weapons fire. Getting his helicopter crew on the radio, Newman advised them to stand off. It was only a matter of seconds after the helicopter left that Newman saw the muzzle flash and the shadowy figure that turned out to be Colonel Phillips. For nearly 20 minutes he and the pilot remained motionless, listening and watching for sounds of the enemy. The sergeant called the helicopter in for another pickup attempt. Again, more ground fire but the penetrator was lowered. As Newman turned to help Col Phillips get on the hoist, he lost sight of the penetrator in the darkness. Finally, he found it, but realized the helicopter crew had dropped too much cable. Because of the excess on the ground, Newman could not follow it to the penetrator seat itself. He asked the helicopter to take up the slack. That when it happened. Apparently Newman's statement was misinterpreted, and before he realized he was standing in the midst of the snarled hoist line, the cable was reeled in. It looped his ankle, jerking him skyward, upside down. Fortunately, his radio was tied to his vest and he pulled it to him. Incredibly calm, he informed the helicopter crew of his predicament and asked them to lower him.

As they flew home, Sergeant Newman took care of the pilot's wounds, splinted his broken arm and checked his dislocated shoulder. He then treated him for shock, making him as comfortable as possible. It was a day to remember by both men, neither would ever forget. Nor would the United States Air Force. Weeks later Sergeant Newman became the third living enlisted man to be awarded the Air Force Cross. But the Air Force was not finished rewarding

this intrepid airman. Some 20 months later, Newman stood in the office of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and became the 12th enlisted man in history to receive or share in the receipt of the Cheney Award.

Today Tom Newman is a technical assistant at Doctor's Hospital in Milwaukee, Wis. He left the Air Force early in 1969, but this former airman has carved a niche in Air Force history. And it will stand through the ages as testimonial to the courage, fortitude and valor of America's airmen.

GRAY, FORREST E. "First Enlisted Man ever to serve as an Air Weather Service Detachment Commander"

He takes the top chair of Detachment 1, 16th Weather Squadron at Fort Leonard Wood, MO., a unit that directly serves and works with the U.S. Army. Sergeant Gray's appointment, according to the Military Airlift Command, is a step toward providing more responsibility and authority to NCOs.

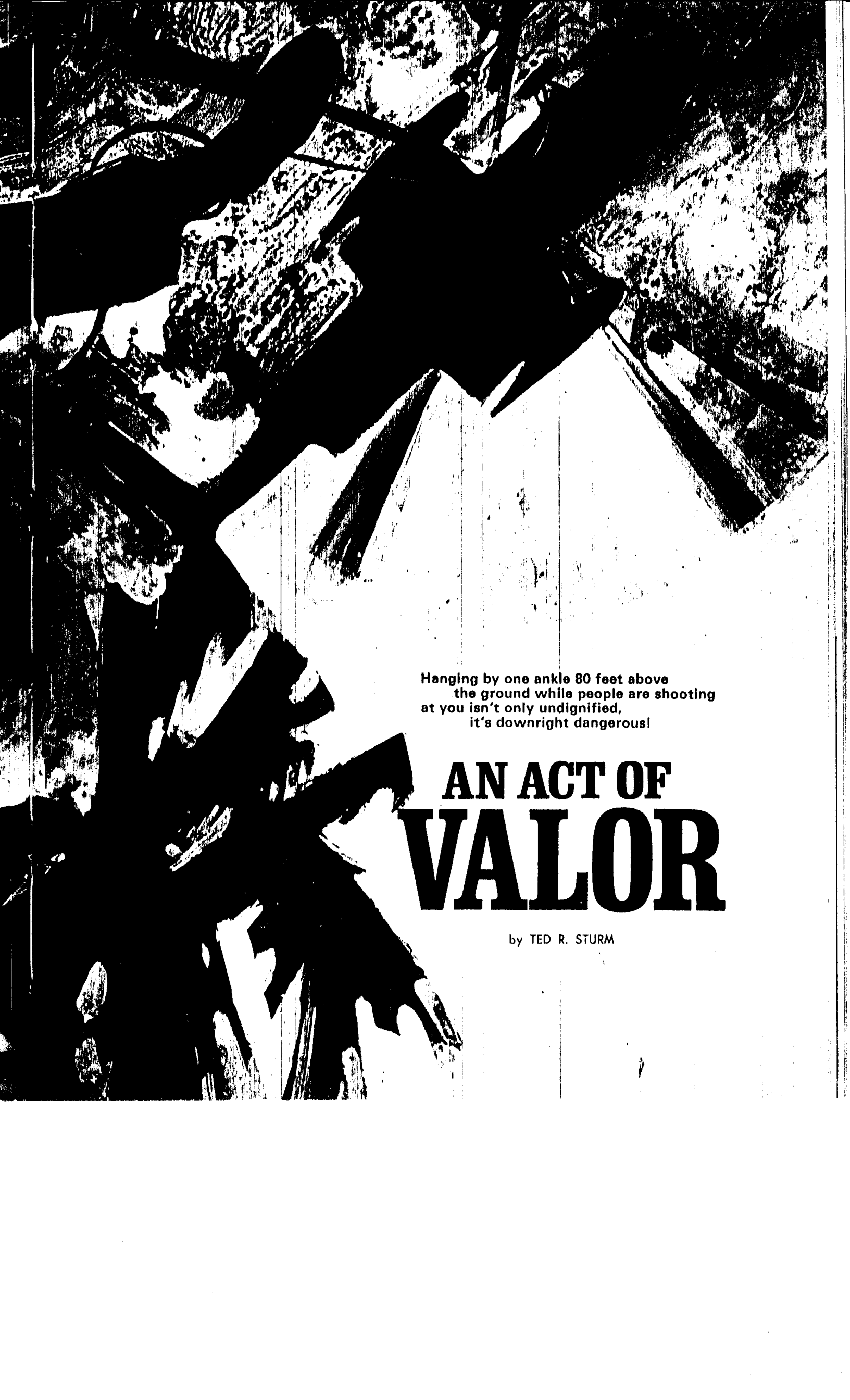
NEWMAN, THOMAS A.

20
18-51-13
D

"The President of the United States of America, authorized by Title 10, Section 8742, United States Code, awards the Air Force Cross to Sergeant Thomas A. Newman for extraordinary heroism in military operations against an opposing armed force as an HH-3E Helicopter Pararescue Specialist in Southeast Asia, on 30 May 1968. On that date, Sergeant Newman voluntarily descended into a hostile jungle environment to rescue a downed Air Force pilot. With complete disregard for his own life, and hampered by darkness and concentrated automatic weapons fire, he requested the rescue helicopter above him to enter a nearby orbit, both for the safety of the crewmembers, and to prevent the hovering aircraft from establishing the survivor's location for the unfriendly ground forces. When the rescue helicopter returned, he secured the injured airman to the forest penetrator and protected him with his own body as they ascended to the helicopter...."

100 Aug
16-D-3-1
X 16-D-2-3





Hanging by one ankle 80 feet above
the ground while people are shooting
at you isn't only undignified,
it's downright dangerous!

AN ACT OF VALOR

by TED R. STURM

Newman wasted no time
in getting to where
the action is.

Through a growing darkness heightened by the dense forest, Sgt. Thomas A. Newman saw the outline of a man.

Flashes from a gun muzzle first attracted his attention, and as he inched his M-16 forward, it occurred to him to hold his fire. It was possible the shadowy figure was the injured F-105 pilot.

On the other hand, it could very well be an enemy soldier. They were all around, constantly announcing their presence by small arms fire. But even if it were the pilot, Newman wasn't sure how to reach him. More likely than not, the man was nervous, and would shoot at anything that moved.

The sergeant watched for another moment and then, even though he might give his position away to the enemy, he decided to shout. Immediately he heard a reply from the figure ahead.

"Over here!" the man answered.

"Sounds American," Newman muttered to himself. "Still, you can't tell. Almost everybody speaks a little English." There was only one way to find out.

Still on his stomach, Sergeant Newman inched forward. It was the pilot, all right, still in his life preserver, G-suit and survival gear. His arm was broken, as Newman had heard earlier. In a matter of minutes, the sergeant cut him free of his gear, and administered first aid.

Both he and the pilot, Col. Norman P. Phillips, could hear people moving through the brush, closing in on their position. Obviously, they had to get out of there in a hurry. But it was not to be an easy, routine rescue this time. Old Dame Fortune was feeling mischievous and had a few more surprises cooked up for this *Thunderchief* pilot and the pararescueman who had come to save him.

But some days are like that. Some days you *never* forget. And the fact that this was Memorial Day—May 30, 1968—only served as an additional reminder that sometimes the difference between a memory and a memorial can be a fraction of an inch, a single strand, or a split second.

Some men wonder, when they find themselves in a very tough spot, how they came to be there. Newman didn't wonder. He knew. When he joined the Air Force in 1965, he wasted no time in getting to where the action is. While he was still in basic, he volunteered for pararescue duty. About a year later, after seven tough, grueling schools that transformed the former high school student into a rescue expert, he was shipped to Guam. That was his first step toward the jungle he now shared with Colonel Phillips and an unknown number of enemy troops.

Newman was a busy man during the 19 months he spent on Guam. Before he left, he managed to help save a civilian seaman suffering from acute insulin shock; assisted a Navy corpsman in saving a chief petty officer who suffered a heart attack aboard a submarine; was credited with saving the lives of two Japanese fishermen who suffered severe burns in an engine room fire on board the fishing vessel *Shoichi Maru*, and aided in the treatment and evacuation of four more. In each of these cases, the indomitable sergeant had to parachute into the open sea.

Sergeant Newman was accepted for duty in Southeast Asia and departed for Eglin AFB, Fla., in December 1967. There he took pararescue specialist training in the HH-3E helicopter. After PACAF Jungle Survival School at Clark AB in the Philippines, he arrived at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand, in March 1968.

That's the kind of a man in whose hands Colonel Phillips' life now lay. And although all pararescue men are the kind of people you trust in any

AIRMAN

situation, Newman had a deep inner strength that he would be forced to draw on before the day ended.

In fact, even before he got on the ground to find the downed pilot, the situation got a little sticky. Newman and his "Jolly Green" crew had been scrambled to recover Phillips after his F-105 had been clobbered by 37mm antiaircraft fire west of Khe Sanh. He had bailed out and, because of the broken arm and a dislocated shoulder, was unable to get himself on the forest penetrator hoist that was to be lowered to him.

So Newman volunteered to ride the hoist down through two layers of jungle treetops and help strap the pilot on. Phillips was down in an area dotted with antiaircraft weapons and numerous enemy units armed with small arms and handheld automatic weapons. Not only that, but the poor visibility brought on by approaching darkness made it impossible for Newman to evaluate the area. He was unable to predetermine his escape routes should he and the pilot be forced to get to an alternate pickup area on foot.

As fighter escort aircraft strafed and bombed the area, Newman's chopper moved in. It was then the radio crackled with another bit of bad news. Because of his broken arm, the pilot was not able to ignite a smoke flare. Finding him would be tough.

Nevertheless, Newman secured himself to the penetrator, and as the helicopter hovered over the downed airman's suspected position, the pararescue-man was lowered to the ground. He immediately established radio contact with the hovering Jolly Green, but could not contact Colonel Phillips.

There was only one way to find the pilot in the darkness and the dense foliage—hunt for him! Newman began to work his way in a constantly expanding circle. He had just completed the first circuit when he noticed that his hovering Jolly Green was catching a lot of automatic weapons fire from a ridge above him.

This situation brought three immediate problems into focus. First, the noise from the helicopter prevented Newman from hearing the enemy or the downed pilot. Second, he feared for the safety of the helicopter crew, and third, the hovering bird would soon draw the enemy forces to his position. Sergeant Newman asked the helicopter to leave. As it moved out, it was subject again to a barrage of heavy automatic weapons fire.

It was only a matter of seconds after the helicopter left that Newman saw the muzzle flash and the shadowy figure that turned out to be Colonel Phillips.

Now, as the colonel and the sergeant huddled in the foliage, they decided the enemy was too close to risk a pickup.

Getting his helicopter crew on the radio, Newman advised them to stand off. He also told them he would be shutting off his radio for a few minutes to evaluate the situation before he called them back in. There was still the danger of their being shot down by ground fire.

For nearly 20 minutes he and the pilot remained motionless, listening and watching for sounds of the enemy. Neither man moved nor made a sound, preventing the enemy from pinpointing their position. Soon the noise of movement in the undergrowth died away.

Now the sergeant called the helicopter in for the pickup. Again, as the chopper moved over their position, it received ground fire. Still they lowered the jungle penetrator. As Newman turned to help Colonel Phillips get on the hoist, he lost sight of the penetrator in the darkness. The numerous vines hanging from the trees all looked like the cable, and Newman had to search more by feel than sight. Finally, he found it, but realized the heli-

... He was hanging upside down 70 to 80 feet above the ground.



Thomas A. Newman, now a civilian, receives the Cheney Award from Chief of Staff John D. Ryan in honor of his act of valor.

copter crew had dropped too much cable. Because of the excess on the ground, Newman could not follow it to the penetrator seat itself.

He asked the helicopter to take up the slack.

That's when it happened! One of those incidents occurred that can never be anticipated. Apparently Newman's statement was misinterpreted, and before he realized he was standing in the midst of the snarled hoist line, the cable was reeled in. It looped his ankle, jerking him skyward, upside down.

The violence of the jolt tore his radio and weapon from his hands. As he rose higher and higher he became entangled in the trees and his leg and ankle were wrenched brutally as he was pulled through the branches by sheer force. Then he went through the second tree canopy, buffeted and banged by the branches, lashed by the vines. Below, he could see the enemy's muzzle flashes, not more than 75 yards from him and the helicopter.

Fortunately, his radio was tied to his vest and he pulled it to him. Incredibly calm, he informed the helicopter crew of his predicament and asked them to lower him. At this point he was hanging upside down 70 to 80 feet above the ground and within 20 feet of the helicopter. Dimly, he could see the penetrator dangling some 30 feet below.

Most of the return trip was far less violent and much more comforting! Using his hands, he was able to avoid entanglement with vines and branches. But as he dropped through the trees the cable loosened around his ankle and he fell the last 20 feet to the ground.

Breaking the impact with his hands, Newman sprained his left wrist. By then, however, the colonel had reached the penetrator. Newman secured him to the seat, strapped himself on and told the chopper to reel away. Again on the trip up, increasingly accurate ground fire gave them a wild ride, but, amazingly, neither man was hit.

As they flew home, Sergeant Newman took care of the pilot's wounds, splinted his broken arm and checked his dislocated shoulder. He then treated him for shock, making him as comfortable as possible.

It had been a day to remember all right. Sergeant Newman and Colonel Phillips would never forget it. Neither would the United States Air Force.

Weeks later, Sergeant Newman became the third living enlisted man to be awarded the Air Force Cross. As Gen. Howell M. Estes, Jr., former commander of the Military Airlift Command, pinned the nation's second highest award on Sergeant Newman's chest, the words of the citation captured a little of the spirit of Newman's Memorial Day.

"Through his extraordinary heroism, superb airmanship, and aggressiveness, Sergeant Newman reflected the highest credit upon himself and the United States Air Force," the citation read.

But the Air Force was not finished rewarding this intrepid airman. Some 20 months after he rescued Colonel Phillips, Thomas A. Newman stood in the office of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and became the 12th enlisted man in history to receive or share in the receipt of the Cheney Award.

The award, established in 1928 in memory of 1st Lt. William H. Cheney, who was killed in an air collision during World War I, consists of a certificate, a bronze medal and a \$500 honorarium. Annually it recognizes an "act of valor, extreme fortitude, or self-sacrifice in a humanitarian interest performed in connection with aircraft."

Today Tom Newman is a technical assistant at Doctor's Hospital in Milwaukee, Wis. He left the Air Force early in 1969. But this former airman has carved a niche in Air Force history. And it will stand through the ages as a testimonial to the courage, fortitude and valor of America's airmen. ✻

